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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3917  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3776  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4486  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000190

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: WOMEN INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN  
DRUG TRADE

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¶1. (SBU) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Chief of the State Counter Narcotics Service (SCNS) reported at the February 5 session of the Cabinet of Ministers that two Ashgabat women had been arrested for heroin smuggling. No other details regarding the women's background or activities were provided in news reports of the incident. During one broadcast, the two women were shown, in tears, publicly admitting guilt and asking for the president's forgiveness. At the cabinet meeting, President Berdimuhamedov expressed "deep concern" over the increasing number of women involved in the drug trade and stressed that there was "no place for drug traffickers in Turkmen society." END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) At the February 5 session of the Cabinet of Ministers, the Chief of the State Counter Narcotics Service (SCNS), Colonel Aman Garayev, reported that two female residents of Ashgabat, Gulshirin Meredova, age 28, and Bahargul Yagshyeva, 35, had been arrested for trafficking and distributing narcotics. Yagshyeva is reportedly married with one son, and Meredova is single. Both were in the business of importing goods from Iran, Turkey, and Dubai. As was shown in television news reports of the incident, the women had attempted to transport brown heroin packed in a nylon sports bag that had been placed in the center of a rolled up curtain. Also confiscated was a large amount of cash in Turkmen manats and U.S. dollars, as well as scales and weights.

¶4. (SBU) As is customary in arrests that are made public, no details were provided about how the

operation was conducted, the amount of heroin seized, the location of their arrest, or the existence of accomplices. Instead, both women were shown standing against a wall, crying and begging for the president's forgiveness. Both publicly admitted their guilt and promised to never again be involved with drugs. Yagshyeva, in her statement, was heard to say, "... I am guilty before my parents and relatives, everybody, and our people. I got involved in this illicit business because I was spoiled. I am a disgrace as a mother and I have destroyed my life." Meredova then confessed "... I repent for getting involved in this illicit business as a woman... I promise I will never ever do it again. Now, I have lost face among people..."

15. (SBU) According a police contact, slightly less than two kilograms of heroin were seized from the women as they attempted to re-enter Turkmenistan from Iran. Reportedly, all of the goods they had with them were also confiscated, together with several thousand dollars worth of cash in Turkmen manats and U.S. dollars. This was reportedly not the first time that the women had imported heroin to Turkmenistan. They had allegedly smuggled drugs into the country from Iran several times during the past year and had managed to elude detection. It is unclear whether customs officials had previously been involved and or who had supplied the drugs to them.

16. (SBU) President Berdimuhamedov referred to the arrests during the cabinet session, and said "... the fight against drugs should be consistent and

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uncompromising. The point here is not about my or somebody else's personal view on this issue. It is much deeper, as it is about [preserving] the fabric of our nation. ... We started the war against drugs by taking administrative measures and established a government agency to combat narcotics. If necessary, we will establish yet another agency to work in this direction..." Underlining the need to take effective measures against drugs, the president then focused on the fact that women appear to comprise the majority of drug traffickers.

17. (SBU) A highlight of the president's speech was when he announced to provincial governors, mayors and heads of public organizations that "In the villages and cities, you are called upon to conduct public events with the participation of elders and other respected people in society and wage a decisive battle against drug addicts and dealers. If we don't call upon all of our people to get involved in the fight against this evil, then we will not be able to achieve our goal and we will not succeed at ridding this evil from our society." Addressing the governor of Ahal province, which borders Iran, he said, "In the province that you head, the mayors of districts work ineffectively with the population. Rather than improving the situation, the level of drug trafficking has increased. The situation is equally bad in the other provinces. We will return to this issue later this year. If the governors of provinces do not achieve good results, I am warning that they will face consequences. If you do not take decisive action, even meeting your cotton or grain harvest quotas will not excuse you." He further admonished non-governmental organizations to work effectively in the battle against drug addicts and dealers, saying "There is no place for drugs in our society."

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Berdimuhamedov's speech was very well received by the public. While no statistics were disclosed, it would appear that the problem is

becoming serious enough that the president felt compelled to refer to the need "rescue a generation" from drugs. Many believe the speech was a green light to NGOs and other public organizations to move ahead in drug demand reduction activities. The president has also put provincial governors on notice, that fighting drugs should be their number one priority.  
END COMMENT.

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